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ABSTRACT

Child rearing is a difficult task in the 1990s. Among U.S. youth today there exists an alarmingly high prevalence of learning, emotional/behavioral, or developmental problems, most of which can be directly traced to the disintegration of family stability. Yet, despite the difficulties of parenting, few people have actually been trained to be parents or to become involved in their children's education. To address these problems, each community needs to develop a comprehensive parent involvement model. A community parent involvement model would include the following elements: (1) training parent trainers to conduct parenting classes in every school; (2) changing the focus of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) to parent-teacher administration; (3) developing at each school a parent education program for expectant parents and parents of very young children; (4) developing a parent education program for parents of elementary age children; (5) developing parent training programs for parents of children with special needs, including children with disabilities and children who are gifted; (6) offering parent training programs in a variety of workplace settings; (7) developing monthly PTA workshops on topics of interest to parents, such as those in the Practical Parenting Series; (8) creating a family lifestyle class for high school students; (9) offering, through local churches, specific training in developmental, emotional, physical, and social skills; and (10) funding preventive-type parenting programs adequately, so that local school districts can write grants for the development and operation of a parent education program. The time has come for society to help find a solution to the parenting problem. (MM)

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PARENT INVOLVEMENT MODEL FOR OUR CHANGING SOCIETY

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Child-rearing is a difficult task in the 1990's; one that requires a certain amount of knowledge and skill. Unfortunately, the reality is that few people are actually trained as parents. Because of this lack of formal training, there is a great need for parent education classes in the 1990's. Parents have the major responsibility in teaching their children to develop effective skills and a sense of values that will assist them in surviving the pressures of society. Parents also seek to establish a healthy basis to assist the child in social and emotional growth.

The media have reported for years that among the youth of our country, there exists an alarmingly high prevalence of learning, emotional/behavioral, or developmental problems. A recent federal report stated that the major cause of the great numbers of American troubled young is the disintegration of family stability. This federally sponsored survey of more than 17,000 children nationwide showed that by the time youngsters enter their teen-age years, one in four suffer from either learning, emotional/behavioral, or developmental problems. Today, these problems effect more than 10 million American children.

The Director of the Research Studies stated that family dynamics is the major factor contributing to the high incidence of childhood problems. Increasing numbers of children experience their parents' divorce, are born outside of marriage, or are raised in conflict-filled families or low-income, low-education, single-parent households. For too long now, parenting has been assumed to be an acquired talent. To disprove this notion, all one has to do is assess the results of the above-mentioned research study.

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Another national research study was conducted in 1990 by the Carnegie Foundation using a survey that consisted of 203 questions given to a random selection of 21,000 teachers nationwide. The results of this study showed that educators considered inadequate parenting (28%) the major problem facing American education. Inadequate parenting was a higher concern than drugs, alcohol, or teenage pregnancy. If the educators really feel that this is the major problem in education, how can they shirk their professional responsibility of educating parents?

A further alarming statistic reported in the Carnegie Foundation study was that educators stated that nine of ten parents were apathetic about their children's education. As Director of the UNLV Parent/Family Wellness Center, I hear one comment continuously from professionals: "Why offer parent education and training classes when parents won't attend anyway?" Professionally, I think this is simply an excuse for professionals not to offer classes, rather than a valid question.

Society constantly expresses concern about how children are reared today, but few communities offer classes to teach skills and provide the knowledge necessary for effective parenting. It is now an accepted fact that involvement and interaction between professionals and parents can have a positive effect on a child. Research results are very positive: When parents and professionals work as partners, children's academic skills increase and behavior-type problems decrease. Educators have the training and skills to teach thirty children in one classroom. Can't this training be modified and taught to parents, so they can be better parents and learn to use appropriate, child-rearing methods in the family room setting? Theories and methods used by educators are not tricks; they are research-proven strategies that work with children and are used to teach new skills, modify behavior, motivate, practice problem solving, and build positive self-esteem.

Over the years, the medical society has assumed some responsibility along with the government in attempting to find solutions to the following health problems: heart disease, cancer, diabetes, childhood diseases, and AIDS. The time has come for the educational society to assume its share of the responsibility in finding a solution to the parenting problem.

RECOMMENDED PARENT INVOLVEMENT MODEL FOR TODAY'S CHANGING SOCIETY

1. Train parent trainers to conduct parent training classes in every school.

2. For grassroots parent involvement, each school needs to organize a PTA unit to develop Parent Education and Parent Training classes. "PTA" should re-evaluate its initials and change the "A" in the title from "Parent-Teacher Association" to "Parent-Teacher Administration." The rationale for this change is that parents, teachers, and administration would form a partnership to educate children. School boards and administration could be held accountable for involving parents in the education process.

3. Every school will develop and set in motion a Parent Education Program to provide expectant parents and parents of infants and toddlers with information, advice, assistance, resource materials, parenting skills, principles of child growth and development, home learning, positive approaches to discipline, and development of a child's self-esteem.

4. Every school will develop and implement a Parent Education Program to provide parents of elementary age students with basic skills for effective parenting. The program should assist parents in creating a strong foundation for children to develop communication skills, social values, social skills, and self-respect. Skills will be taught to: assist parents in daily communication with the child; demonstrate consistent and responsible behavior; understand child development; know capabilities, limitations, and needs of the

child; establish a positive learning environment; and know how to handle and improve behavior.

5. School districts should develop parent training programs for parents of learning disabled, emotionally disturbed, mentally and/or physically handicapped, and gifted children. The four or five session program should discuss characteristics, tutorial techniques, and information to assist parents in developing short- and long-range plans for the exceptional child.

6. Today's family comes in many different styles and shapes. We still have fathers working while mothers stay home, but we also have fathers and mothers who both work away from home, single parents, blended families (yours, mine, and ours), unmarried couples (with children), and "sandwich" families. We are at the forefront of a change in the American family. To assist the changing family, we must offer a variety of parent training programs in a variety of settings. The workplace should offer "Lunch and Learn" parenting classes. These sessions could be set up as a partnership between school district and employer. School districts could provide trained instructors to conduct workshops in the workplace.

7. The PTA in every school should develop monthly workshops to cover topics that are of interest to parents concerned with various issues. The Practical Parenting Series is a set of eight parent training video tapes that have been sequenced for implementation in a program such as this. Beginning in September and continuing on until May, these tapes could provide the topic to be addressed each month, with a culminating workshop on summer or home activities presented in the ninth month of the school year.

8. One of the most important parts of the recommended parent training model is to have every high school develop a family lifestyle class for the students. The family lifestyle class should address the pros and cons of different family make-ups in the 1990's. The class should give prospective parents (and some who are already parents) a much-needed operator manual to help them through the challenges, issues, and rewards they will face in their lifetime endeavor. The goal of this program is to provide teenagers with a realistic picture of the responsibilities of raising a child in the 1990's.

9. Churches should offer specific training in developmental, emotional, physical, and social skills classes. The classes should follow the Lamaze-type classes ad continue through adolescent age years. Family lifestyle classes (e.g., single parent families, blended families, etc.) should be conducted in the church setting.

10. Every year when politicians are seeking office, from the President of the United States to city officials, they preach on how we need parent involvement. After elections, other issues seem more pressing. The bottom line is that preventive-type programs are not sufficiently funded. For the recommended parent involvement model to become a reality, state legislators should establish appropriations in order that local school districts can write grants for development and operation of a Parent Education or Parent Training Program.

Each community must develop a comprehensive parent involvement model. The model must be an "inclusive" and not "exclusive" model. The bottom line is that dysfunctional families are a reflection of our communities and society.

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